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WHISTLER

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WAS PUBLISHED UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

ANDRÉ GLOECKNER

IN COLLABORATION WITH

ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART, ANDOVER

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

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WHISTLER

BY

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Photo Research and Bibliography by

AIMÉE CRANE

NEW YORK

CROWN PUBLISHERS

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AMERICAN ARTISTS SERIES

Uniform with this volume

GEORGE BELLOWS, by Peyton Boswell, Jr.
WINSLOW HOMER, by Forbes Watson
THOMAS EAKINS, by Roland McKinney
WHISTLER, by James W. Lane

Other titles in preparation

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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What was he, this many-sided personage known as Jimmy Whistler, whose hallmark was the butterfly, whose lash was the tongue and pen, whom the world would like to toss off with an epithet or a peal of laughter, but whose art has the secret of outlasting derogatory criticism? Julius Meier-Graefe, the early-twentieth-century German historian, treated him as four persons—the Englishman, the Frenchman, the Japanese, and the Spaniard. In this year of grace—though grace, especially the grace of Whistler, seems more and more to be crushed underfoot—Jerome Mellquist has viewed Whistler as purely American. It will do no harm to make a synthesis of all these national characteristics (for they are certainly present in Whistler's art) and admit that he was possessed of each one of them without becoming any the more enigmatic.

Whistler, indeed, is not an enigma at all. People used to say that the young Robert Browning was, and they are apt to say it of any bright, richly-dowered person who has not yet found himself. G. K. Chesterton pointed out that with the young Browning outward obscurity was merely a mark of inner sanity. But Whistler has been

aspersed as a malicious, pugnacious, dandified, superficial human being posing as a painter and having therefore little substance in his art. Some of these charges were true. He was aggressive and insulting, as C. R. Leyland, Mortimer Menpes, George Moore's brother, Godwin, and William Eden [1] knew only too well, but viewed against the circumstances of his life the scenes he made had meaning. They were not merely temperamental. In fact, to look at pictures of Whistler as a boy and young man, one finds nothing of the kibitzer or misanthrope, but only the optimism and idealism of aspiration. His spirit broke later under a series of blows, but his art —and this is the amazing thing—never did. It is a major paradox, among several that have given him his undesired reputation as the great What-Is-It, that for so robust a man, bristling with righteous denunciations almost as much as his grande bête-noire, Ruskin, the art of Whistler is so singularly unflamboyant. Even George Moore, who was addicted to gilding the lily and to gossip of the backstairs variety and who called Whistler more nervous than robust, became ridiculous in trying to criticize the Nocturnes. In these works of perfect composition, impersonality, and taste, where, if ever in art, nature is seen under the guise of eternity, Whistler whittled out his permanent niche in the halls of fame.

The Nocturnes mean specifically the thrill of early evening, one of the most attractive of the twenty-four hours, when, as Whistler said in his *Ten O'Clock Lecture*, the

[1] Mr. Croal Thompson, who engineered the revolution in Whistler's reputation by the Goupil Gallery show of 1892, wrote in Pennell's Life (vol. II, p. 118): "I became convinced that all Mr. Whistler's quarrels originated because the person concerned did not correctly understand and appreciate his work; once Mr. Whistler became assured of living sympathy in his productions, my experience was that he was ready to accept all the rest."

> "mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairyland is before us—"

Well, no need to labor the point—though Whistler beautifully does so—for the modern dweller in skyscrapered cities.

Nor does Whistler's nervousness explain the quality of the rest of his art. It may, at the very least, inform us why he left so much —etchings, especially—that seems unfinished. But nervousness does not perfectly explain why so many of the plates went into ten states. This is better resolved by referring to his exacting conscience. No artist can be said to be purely nervous whose output of prints, uneven in quality though it sometimes was, was both so prodigious and talented.

It is contemporary influences, rather than nervousness of temperament (to be sure, a pinch of temperament had, like a condiment, to be added), that made Whistler what he was. An American, thrust like Edgar Allan Poe into a West Point for which he had, though his father was a major of engineers, little aptitude save straight bearing, Whistler soon found out that he did not belong, either to West Point or to the Coastal Survey, on one of his etchings for which he flaunted unmilitary exuberances in the shape of marginal portraits and caricatures. By these tokens and a dismissal from the Survey, even his mother and father saw the set of his jib and allowed him to go to Paris, on $350 a year.

Paris, the year that Whistler arrived (1855), was one of the most exciting places for art in the world. The world was rich then. Middle-class families were beginning to follow industry or commerce as the favorite profession. But other members, stifling in the

set conventionalities of the business community, yearned for the artistic life. If they were not Parisians and not French, they inevitably went to Paris. Thus came George Inness, John La Farge, William Morris, Hunt, later Thomas Eakins and Robert Louis Stevenson. They found the distinguished older generation—Sainte-Beuve, Heine, Delacroix, and later Turgenev, and an equally distinguished younger one—Monet, Legros, Fantin-Latour, Pissarro and Renoir—the last group of whom in 1866 began to foregather regularly at the Cafe Guerbois, on the Avenue de Clichy, until the War of 1870 stopped their meetings. Famous academicians, like Gleyre, in whose atelier Whistler studied, and Couture were to be found meting out instruction to the young hopefuls of art.

Gleyre was busy teaching Whistler that grey was the basis of tone. Such was the tenet that the generation of the 'fifties found in Velasquez, the ruling European fashion. Monet and Sargent were to propagate it. It suited Whistler's temperament, which, although anything but grey, was seeking backgrounds for his paintings that should communicate spaciousness and deliver, American-wise, a message in the fewest words. The whole aim of Whistler's art was non-literary. He sought for few tones and few lines in both water-color and oil. His need was to convey a mood, not to tell a story, and by opening up his picture-space in landscapes by tones of grey and blue he did more to revolutionize English painting of that moment, which took its sermons neat, than any other painter.

But in 1862 something greater than the practise of Velasquez swam into his ken. This was the art of Japanese prints. Paris was just getting its first taste of Japanese culture. The Japan which burst upon the attention of the world in 1854 through the treaties signed with the United States and Great Britain, following Commodore Matthew Perry's visit to Kurihama with the United States

Fleet, charmed the West. Ten years later France negotiated a convention of amity with Japan. Within a few years, in 1867, the International Exhibition in Paris made Japanese culture fashionable and intellectual France was probably more interested in *japonaiserie* than in Maximilian in Mexico or the fate of French armies in Rome or Cambodia. The Franco-Japanese convention made for the exchange of culture. It is curious to reflect, exactly three quarters of a century after the Exhibition, on how each nation used the agreement—the West to fall under the spell of the art of the East, while the Japanese flocked not only to European institutes but also to the military academies. At any rate, if our eyes were not to be opened to Japanese military talent seventy-five years ago, they certainly were to their art.

Bracquemond, the bird etcher, as early as 1856 owned a volume of Hokusai's prints, from which for his own plates, like *Swallows In Flight* and *Lapwing and Teal*, he took notes. Auguste Delâtre, his printer, discovered this. Delâtre, unpacking a set of china one day, also discovered, serving as the paper pads that kept the pieces of crockery from cracking, Hiroshige prints. This was in 1862. Now the news spread rapidly. Japanese colored prints enlivened the bazaars. The painters bought them—Monet, Tissot, Whistler, Fantin-Latour, Degas, and Carolus Duran, the two last of whom influenced respectively Mary Cassatt and Sargent. Whistler had a valuable blue and white china tea service. According to Richard Muther,[1] "a group of artists and critics founded a Japanese society of the 'Jinglar' which met every week in Sèvres at the house of Solon, the director of the manufactory. They used a Japanese dinner-service, designed by Bracquemond, and everything except the napkins, cigars, and ash-trays was Japanese."

[1] *The History of Modern Painting*, New York, 1907, vol. III, pp. 101-102.

Yet it was not for any exotic call which Japanese art made to him that Whistler meditated upon the design of oriental art. Neither was it *pour embêter les bourgeois.* But Whistler was an *arrangeur*—which is what Meier-Graefe termed him—and was deeply appealed to by the oriental view of composition. He found that the whole art of the Orient was one of spacing, bolstered by color and by mood and,[1] as Sir Charles Holmes has written, "the works of Whistler show how little material is really needed to make a fine work of art, provided only the spacing is well and boldly planned."

Nevertheless, his immersion in the Japanese—visible in most of his oils from the sampans and junks into which he transformed the Thames riverboats to the silhouetted rounded bridges like Westminster, Hungerford, and Battersea—brought certain weaknesses in train. The colors he used were on the blue and grey side, bringing out the characteristics of blue that Wassily Kandinsky[2] has noted—retreat from the spectator and turning in upon its center. But what Whistler gains in depth of mood he loses in vivacity of tone. Sir Charles Holmes, who as Director of the National Portrait Gallery had good cause to know,[3] found that Whistler, often being drawn to the fascinating effect of a thin spread of blue or grey on a dark ground, "frequently used them in this way, with the result that some of his most delightful paintings are darkening steadily year by year, as the ground begins to tell more and more through the delicate films of paint laid over it."

Yet Whistler's contribution to right and decorative design was monumental. His technique was as sure as the ground he had—

[1] *Notes on the Science of Picture Making*, London, 1911, p. 82.
[2] In *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*.
[3] *Notes on the Science of Picture Making*, p. 214

blocking out boldly, drawing simply and with regard to the value of the silhouette or of black on white, composing with stringently few details, and gathering the more mood the more he left out. His palette, a rectangular tray with deeply set divisions, was notable on the pigmental side, too. Moreau-Vauthier describes only eleven pigments in Whistler's palette. This economy is traceable to Japanese influences. The Japanese color-prints that Whistler studied have only a few colors. Indeed the whole Impressionist school, under Japanese sway, lightened its palette by lessening it. In any case, Whistler uses fewer paints than any other prominent French nineteenth century painter, except Pissarro. Out of white, yellow ochre, raw sienna, vermilion, Venetian red, Indian red, burnt sienna, umber, cobalt, mineral blue and black, Whistler found his chromatic realm. Reds never counted for very much here, except as a grace-note. None of your tympanous, Tintoretto and Titian and Rubens reds for Whistler. What issued were the simple harmonies, arrangements, and nocturnes, all in keeping with the philosophy of the man who stoically lived up to his statement in the *Ten O'Clock Lecture* that "to say to the painter that nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player that he may sit on the piano."

And so, from a deep study of Japanese art, was born the art of design, the art of *multum in parvo*, the art of nuances that was Whistler's at its best. This development is datable between 1862 and 1866, and thereafter tinctures a large fraction of all his oils and prints. His prints, under the Japanese influence, where everything leads to a center of interest, are sometimes weak because the backgrounds are vague, as in *Old Hungerford Bridge*. This is, in the words of Theodore Bolton, the vignette method, and its greatest achievement, it seems to me, comes in the lithographs, with *Savoy Pigeons* and *Little London Bridge*, and, in the etchings, with *Loches*.

The first painting to show Whistler's artistic obsession with the Far East was the celebrated *Little White Girl*, of 1862. When shown in the *Salon des Réfusés* of 1863, it brought almost quite as much comment as Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. Business people or Philistines ruled the art world more in those days than now, when sometimes artists who are apt to be short in common sense or balance have it too much their own way. But in Whistler's time only Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Duranty and a few others were Daniels-come-to-judgment.

Whistler was probably discouraged by the reception accorded the *Little White Girl*, which has in it, next to the bow to Japanese traditions, hints that Whistler, as he was soon to show in his *Wapping* and in the *Carlyle* and the *Mother*, loved Vermeer. But fortunately for his immediate peace of mind he had in London a sister married to Seymour Haden. To London he went in 1863 and there, finally settling, though he had lived in Chelsea off and on since 1859, made his home until the Ruskin libel trial of 1878 set him on the road again.

These were years of deepening accomplishment and philosophy, though he had little to show for them except public and critical apathy. Like La Farge, Whistler found in the first part of his career that painting was an unremunerative profession. The English critics and artists inaugurated an anvil chorus that his works were unfinished. For years, until 1891, when success came to him with the sale of the *Mother*, it was the stock criticism of his work. Nevertheless, the years of the late 'sixties and of the 'seventies that he spent in London were well spent. Either he was rowed out on the Thames by the Greaves brothers, from a shipbuilding yard, who were his boatmen, evening after evening or he pounded the streets with his notebook and Albert Moore, a staunch friend who was almost as

enslaved by Japanese art as Whistler himself. It must not be thought that Whistler did more than attempt to make color notes during these Limehouse and London nights. As a true Parisian artist of the early 'sixties, he had learned, in the school of theory championed by Lecoq de Boisbaudran, that to draw effectively you had to draw from memory. Nor could Whistler have endured the physical discomforts of long exposure to the elements, for he was a rheumatic and was beginning by the late 'seventies and 'eighties—the period of the Nocturnes—to feel the aching of his joints. So, although Whistler had a detailed knowledge of London, it proceeded less from much time spent in the streets than from an able recording pencil and retentive visual memory.

He was undoubtedly the greatest etcher of his time, and it was a time of great etchers and illustrators. His prints had less texture but more of what A. M. Hind calls "surface tone" than anyone else's. Lepère and Legros had greater masculinity and substance; no one, not even Forain, had greater delicacy or originality. His earliest etchings in France, from 1855 to 1859, like the *Ile de la Cité* and *Liverdun*, show that he was studying Meryon. In the unfinished former the refinement of the iron railing and the vertical touches for windows create a fascinating composition, which one can only regret was uncompleted, possibly because Whistler saw he could not throw the Meryon influence out of the window. In the *Liverdun* and *Street at Saverne* there is a simplicity and stark strength of composition which Whistler never quite approached again, though the deserted quality is rather charmless. Nevertheless, this is a print to which D. Y. Cameron has owed much, suggesting the umbrageous flowerings of dry-point burrs. There is one other point about Whistler's beginnings as a printman: he was obsessed by doorways. He graduated from unconvincing cartouches of doorways, such as

we see in *La Vieille aux Loques*, a print in which the eye is not led anywhere and remains on an uninteresting dead center, to off-centered doorways representing some depth of focus within them, as in *La Marchande de Moutarde* and the *Kitchen*. These manifest a very measurable advance in texture, shading, and variety of interest, an excellent indication that Whistler, in those Parisian days, was not dawdling. He has been thought of in this period as the lazy amateur and Pennell's *Life* does not dispel the notion. But no man who was making such strides in etching can be put down as a flâneur. From 1859 to 1871 he was busying himself with the Thames set. Among these are some of his masterpieces. For density of expression, for which one searches almost in vain in his later work, plates like *Thames Police* and *Limehouse* are unrivaled. His first fine etching in his whole career comes now, the *Thames Warehouses*, of 1859, which has influenced W. R. Wyllie. One begins to realize this early how conscientious Whistler was. He etched and re-worked more than most etchers. The *Billingsgate* went through eight states and not a few other prints went through ten.

These early etchings are characteristic of one thing which is constant to all of Whistler's periods. No other etcher can put so much in his prints as Whistler and get away with it. Yet Whistler's best and fullest etchings, like the Chelsea, London, and Lido scenes, pulsate with energy. Your eye is led around and about them. For that reason, though often lacking a center of interest, they have artistic unity. Whistler's prints—those that have a center of interest and those that don't—are found in all periods of his career. Each brand can be artistic.

This really was Whistler's grandest contribution to art. In a way he had the luck of the Irish. He was born—at Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1834—in a period when art needed a vacuum-cleaning

such as it has rarely so completely received. He found French painting talented but unoriginal and gave it a lift both towards realism (through his friendship with Courbet) and towards decoration; he found English painting anemic, frigid, timid, and anecdotic, and gave it an aesthetic foundation which, helped by the importation of continental ideals through the Slade School, it has kept ever since. More quickly than any other western painter, he discovered the talisman of design in the art of Japan and in a trice readapted it to be the talisman of western art. He found that pastel had died out —and, laughed at at first, revived it and placed it on heights of beauty it had not previously reached. He found etching able enough, but once his was brought into the comparison, what had been done before him appeared unoriginal, flat-footed, much as heavy ironmasonry contrasts with the light *jeux* of filigree. But his own marks have been all-pervasive: on hardly a single subsequent etcher has he left no impress. Haden, Duveneck, Cameron, McBey, Wyllie, Pennell, Marin, Woodbury, on these and many others the master left an indelible impression. His meticulous search for perfection took him to Holland and France for the exact quality of paper desired and caused him to do nearly all of his own printing. As Percy Thomas, the son of Sergeant Thomas who brought Auguste Delâtre, the famous French printer, over from Paris, said: "Nobody has ever printed Mr. Whistler's etchings with success except himself and M. Delâtre." Yet this perfectionism of Whistler's created a great upswing in the popularity of prints which has not diminished.

He was just as versatile as a lithographer. Indeed, on the side of subtlety, he is one of the greatest of lithographers. His mastery of tone and distance in such plates as the *Savoy Pigeons* or the *Little London* is ineffably beautiful. He does not try for strength and

firmness, as, for example, Stow Wengenroth or the currently fashionable school. Even in lithography Whistler brings out the charm of the evanescent, but more than that, he seems to show that all this too, too solid earth is evanescent, will resolve itself into a dew, and pass, like everything mortal. Thus, to charm he adds sadness, poetry, and philosophy.

The whole adds up to great and utter simplicity. Each of Whistler's fine portraits and landscapes is unassuming in its features. No lugs, no false elegance, no mannerisms. The *Cicely Alexander*, the *Duranty*, the *Lady Archibald Campbell*, the *Mrs. Leyland* have design, but few strokes, little paint. Whistler was following out precepts which he and Duranty had probably for long discussed at the Café Guerbois. By 1860 Duranty was publishing a little magazine entitled *Réalisme*. By 1876 he had enunciated the principles of *La Nouvelle Peinture:* that an artist should be able to paint a portrait of a man in his environment so that the observer can tell the character of a man from his clothes. This is true of all these portraits, as it also is of *The Blacksmith* and *Little Rose of Lyme Regis*, two early portraits, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which in their precision, substance, and quality of facial modeling remind one of Fayum encaustics. Furthermore, Whistler was very accomplished in obtaining good likenesses, especially of women. He might take the eighty sittings that Walter Gay reports him to have required on occasion, but the simplicity of the finished work belies the labor.

The nocturnes are the epitome of this precious art. Whistler, defining them at the Ruskin trial, said:

> "I have perhaps meant rather to indicate an artistic interest alone in the work, divesting the picture from any outside sort of interest which might have been otherwise attached to it. It is an

> arrangement of line, form and color first, and I make use of any incident of it which shall bring about a symmetrical result. Among my works are some night pieces; and I have chosen the word Nocturne because it generalizes and simplifies the whole set of them."

A nocturne could be of sunset, dusk, or night. A few of them look like daylight scenes in fog. But, apart from their giving the charm of Oriental forms, such as junks, river grass, and the bridge at Tokio, to the English Thames, the hand that created them understood perfectly the most important components of great landscape art—spaciousness, depth, repose, and grace. You will not find stormy moments in the nocturnes; that would go against the grain. Yet Whistler was capable at portraying storm also—witness his *Blue Wave*, painted at Biarritz, and other sea studies painted, some of them with Courbet at Trouville and many watercolors in England.

The Nocturnes, the idea for which Whistler developed in 1866 when he was aboard a warship in Valpariso Harbor, was the part of Whistler's output that the English could not tolerate. Had he been a painter of portraits alone, Ruskin, who represented to Whistler all that was bad in English art, might never have troubled him. But in the summer of 1877, at the Grosvenor Gallery, Whistler exhibited eight oils, the portraits *Irving as Philip II of Spain* and *Thomas Carlyle*, two "arrangements," and four nocturnes, of which latter only one was then unsold. This was the *Nocturne in Black and Gold* or *The Falling Rocket.* Ruskin, whose flowing periods could conceal a good deal of peppery malice, decided that he would not attack the three sold nocturnes, but *The Falling Rocket.* He went to it with vim and venom: "I . . . never expected" (he wrote in *Fors Clavigera*) "to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."

The matter ended up in the law courts, one of the most famous trials in the history of the British Bar. Art, for it was art that Whistler was defending, while Ruskin, though not present at the trial, was defending his right to criticize what he considered bogus art, came off second-best. But only for a time, during which Whistler, himself a punster and lampooner, was lampooned and vilified in the public press. The time was to come twelve years later when, at the Goupil Gallery, he saw what he stood for accepted by the English people who counted.

The trial, as we look back on it now, was a farce. Rossetti and Burne-Jones testified against Whistler, the former, Mr. Facing-Both-Ways, calling *The Falling Rocket* not an exquisite painting yet both a work of art and worth its price, the latter admitting Whistler's art but regretting its lack of finish. Never has an opinion, in the light of subsequent art history, seemed more fatuous than Burne-Jones':

> "Mr. Whistler gave infinite promise at first, but I do not think he has fulfilled it. I think he has evaded the great difficulty of painting, and has not tested his powers by carrying it out. The difficulties in painting increase daily as the work progresses, and that is the reason so many of us fail. We are none of us perfect. The danger is this, that if unfinished pictures become common, we shall arrive at a stage of mere manufacture and the art of the country will be degraded."

No wonder that Whistler is said to have remarked after the trial: "Well, you know, I don't go so far as to Burne-Jones, but really somebody ought to burn Jones' pictures." Today the pictures of Burne-Jones, with their involved, allegoristic moralism, are seen to be the bogus art, unmentionable alongside of Whistler's.

The defense for Whistler, such as there was, summed up by re-

marking that Ruskin had "not condescended to give reasons for the view he has taken." A few hours later Whistler was awarded a farthing's damages and plaintiff and defendant had to pay the costs of the trial between them.

For Ruskin, a rich man whose income had come from his family's sherry business, this was simple; for Whistler it meant bankruptcy. He attributed his bankruptcy to Leyland, who had been unwilling to pay Whistler one thousand guineas more than the contract sum for the Peacock Room decorations (which Whistler had never permitted him to see while in work). Nevertheless, if Whistler had won the Ruskin case, he might have been saved financial discomfort.

Yet much in life can be looked upon as a blessing in disguise. Whistler lost the case and as a serious artist had to endure what I should have thought the crowning ignominy in the Attorney-General's address to the jury. Herein it was suggested that the word "coxcomb," used by Ruskin, was not libelous but "carried the old idea of the licensed jester. If that were the true defiintion, Mr. Whistler should not complain, because his pictures were capital jests which had afforded much amusement to the public." Whistler's rehabilitation with the public, as the public realized that he was not only a serious but an original and great artist, threw the former idea of his pictures being jests into ridiculous relief. Whistler's bankruptcy forced him to make more money and he signed the contract (in 1879) with the Fine Art Society to go to Venice and make there twelve plates. The resultant etchings, produced when Whistler was half-freezing and ill-nourished, are those by which his fame in the popular mind chiefly hangs. The good ones, the *Long Lagoon*, the upright *Venice*, are marvelous and fully deserve their reputation. In them Whistler suggests the almost infinity of space for small ships that Nature there seems to suggest. He also knows

better what to do with the foreground where, in Whistler, little ordinarily happens. But certain others, like the *Doorway*, are weak and dull; the figures in them, when visible, are un-Italian. Nevertheless, it was with wonderfully enhanced reputation that Whistler picked up the threads of his London life in 1881.

His art was at full tide. His *My Mother* and his *Carlyle*, both of which were sold in 1891, the one to the Luxembourg (it now belongs to the Louvre), the other to the Glasgow Museum, were huge popular successes. His etchings had gone well. America was beginning to lend an ear which resulted in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts devoting an exhibition to him in 1881. So in 1892 the Goupil Gallery in London got behind him. Whistler wrote and decorated the catalogue himself. Society came and was conquered. It laughed at him no more, because one doesn't laugh when one sees originality working in dead earnest. One doesn't laugh at the ideas which one senses are to rule the art world through right of eminent domain. Whistler's hour had arrived. It was a seller's market for his pictures now, the prices having leapt up.

Some say that the *Mother* and the *Carlyle* are "obvious" paintings. I find them full of subtleties of design and arrangement. In them you see Whistler's love not only of a Japanese type of outlined line, now sinuous in the sloping descent from Carlyle's brow to his shoes interrupted only by the knobbed interlude of the hat upon his knees, and now perfectly severe as in the straight-backed chair against the flat background, but also of the value of prints upon the wall at dramatic intervals, which comes from Vermeer. Though the *Mother* became the subject of a popular United States three-cent stamp issue, and hackneyed as a theme, it is also nonetheless outstanding as a piece of composition and drawing.

Whistler had received his fullest fame in London. The English

had made much more of him than the French. Nevertheless, Whistler was more French in his apperceptions. He had a Frenchman's taste for good food and wines, even a Frenchman's love of Bohemianism, which ran back to his student days of the 'fifties, when he was a disciple of Murger's *Vie de Bohême*. The French had had the appreciation to buy his *Mother*. Also what was Irish in him saw red at British stolidity. In 1888 Whistler, then fifty-four years old, married Mrs. Beatrix Godwin, the widow of the architect of his London residence, The White House on Tite Street. Whistler had had several mistresses who modeled for him, but this was his first marriage. It probably decided him four years later, the year of the Goupil show, to move to Paris, where he settled in the Rue du Bac.

Whistler became more of a literary than an artistic figure in the French capital. He stayed away from French painters but became an intimate of Mallarmé, who had translated into French the *Ten O'Clock Lecture*. His own paintings were in sympathy with Verlaine and the French literary movement of Symbolism. He had composed his portraits, his landscapes, his watercolors, his etchings under a purposeful blurr. He wished to dream about things of the world and to touch them with only a butterfly's wings. Nor was he alone in this. The spirit of the 'eighties was one of soft-focus. Carrière had it, Cazin had it, and it survived down into the twentieth century in the delicate, crespuscular fogs of Le Sidaner. But Whistler was the kingpin of these lovers of mist. He was not burned out of it by the brilliant clashes of Impressionist and Pointillist dots. His work remained brilliant in its execution but not in color up to the end, which came in 1903.

The easy thing to do with Whistler is the wrong thing. Say that

his art strikes you as effeminate, eviscerated, and fuzzy; you may think you have a yardstick but you have only damned that which is most truly art. Save for the great Rubensian whirl and gust—and the bursting of *The Falling Rocket*, where there was whirl, made amends for that general lack—Whistler had everything the great artist needs. Most artists don't have as much.

Look at Whistler as a contrast, too. To the world of the moment, in which most things are standing on their heads, he opposes sanity. He gives us the feeling that life, though, as an English writer well said, a long pull upstream, can nevertheless be viewed steadily and whole. To feverish and constant propaganda he opposes a message of calm and peace. To scientific realism masquerading as art, or as the last word, he opposes the intuition of poetry. That intuition was an intuition of daintiness but not of weakness, flaccidity, or lack of discipline. As Pennell, his biographer, says: "He rounded out his shortest letter, as carefully as a portrait or a nocturne, until all traces of labor in finishing it had disappeared. This was one reason why people, awed by the spectacle of Ruskin laboring through the many volumes of *Modern Painters* without succeeding in the end in saying what he wanted, could not believe that Whistler was seriously saying anything that mattered in a few pages showing no sign of labor at all." Finally, to the banal, which affronts the modern eye and ear in the vulgarities of press and radio, Whistler opposes the well-thought-out, the planned, the sensitive approach. He gives the most precious thing that the modern world could desire—pause, and recollection, and a sense of deep originality refreshed by springs of subtle thought and sound art. Whistler was, underneath all his American roguery and formidable teasing wit, a discerning man, and the art as well as the words of wise men are as goads.

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JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER

Born Lowell, Mass., 1834
Died London, 1903

He was educated at West Point and in 1855 moved to England. After two years of study under the artist, Gleyre, in Paris, he returned to London to set up his own studio.

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WHISTLER

Portrait of Himself *Oil* c. 1858
18¼″ x 14⅝″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Old Battersea Bridge *Oil* c. 1865
25″ x 30″
Collection Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover

Illustration for
"Bruckhardt von
Keller"
Wood Engraving
1862
1⅛" x 3⅞"
In the Collection
of the
Brooklyn Museum,
New York

Southend Pier *Watercolor*
6⅝″ x 9⅝″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Right:
The White Girl (Detail) *Oil* 1862
84½″ x 42½″
Collection National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C

Whistler - 1862.

Nursemaids: Les Bonnes du Luxembourg *Lithograph* 1894
7⅞″ x 6⅛″
In the Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York

The Gossips, Ajaccio *Watercolor* 1901
10¾″ x 7″
Collection of the Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo

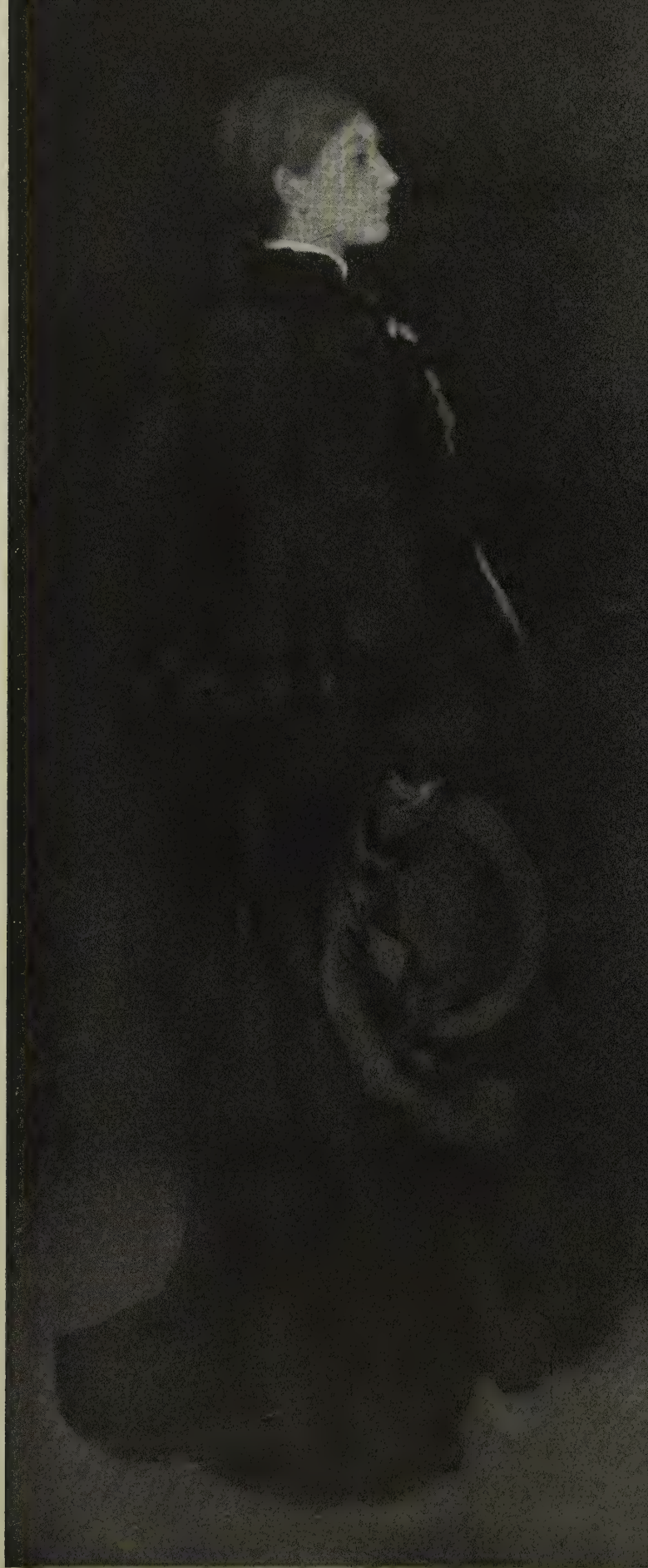
Little Venice *Etching* 1861
10½" x 7½"
Courtesy of Harlow, Keppel & Co., New York

Pink Note: Shelling Peas *Watercolor* c. 1884
9½" x 5 9/16"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Right:
Red House, Paimpol
Lithograph in color 1893
9″ x 6⅝″
Collection of The Cincinnati Art Museum

Harmony in Yellow and Gold:
The Gold Girl, Connie Gilchrist *Oil*
c. 1876
85¾″ x 43⅛″
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac *Oil* 1890-91
81″ x 35″
Courtesy of Frick Collection, New York



Rosa Corder *Oil* c. 1876
78″ x 35½″
Courtesy of Frick Collection, New York

A Chinese quadrilateral porcelain bottle *Drawing* 1878
9″ x 7″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

A Chinese quadrilateral porcelain bottle *Drawing* 1878
9″ x 7″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Below:
Peacocks Panel, south side of Peacock Room *Oil* 1876-77
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Left:
Arrangement in Flesh-Color and Black:
Théodore Duret *Oil* 1883
76⅛″ x 35¾″
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York

Arrangement in Black and White, No. 1:
The Young American *Oil* c. 1870-78
74⅝″ x 34⅞″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Sketches for "Tillie" *Drawing*
12" x 8"
Courtesy of the Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University

The Forge *Etching* 1871
7⅝″ x 12¾″
Courtesy of Kennedy & Co., New York

St.-Giles-in-the-Fields *Lithograph* 1896
8½″ x 5½″
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Street in Saverne *Etching* 1857
$8\frac{3}{16}$" x $6\frac{1}{4}$"
Collection of the Cincinnati Art Museum

Morning Before the Massacre of St. Bartholomew *Wood Engraving* 1862
$5\frac{7}{8}$" x 4"
In the Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York

Little London *Lithograph* 1896
7⅜″ x 5⅜″
In the Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York

Savoy Pigeons *Lithograph* 1896
7¼" x 5⅜"
In the Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York

Blue and Silver: Trouville *Oil*
23¼" x 28½"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Left:
The Angry Sea *Oil* c. 1884
4⅝" x 8¼"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

John Grove *Lithograph* 1895
8⅛" x 6"
Courtesy of Kennedy & Co., New York

Battersea Reach *Oil*
20″ x 30″
Collection of The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Portrait of John Ross Key *Drawing* 1854
14″ x 11⅛″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Limehouse II *Lithograph* 1878
6¾″ x 10⅜″
Courtesy of Kennedy & Co., New York

The Major's Daughter *Wood Engraving* 1862
5″ x 4⅜″
In the Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York

Sunday at Domberg *Watercolor*
5½" x 9½"
Courtesy of the Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University

Black Lion Wharf *Etching* 1859
5⅞" x 8⅞"
Collection of The Cincinnati Art Museum

Dorsetshire Landscape *Oil* 1895
12″ x 24″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

The Little Green Cap *Oil*
20″ x 12¼″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

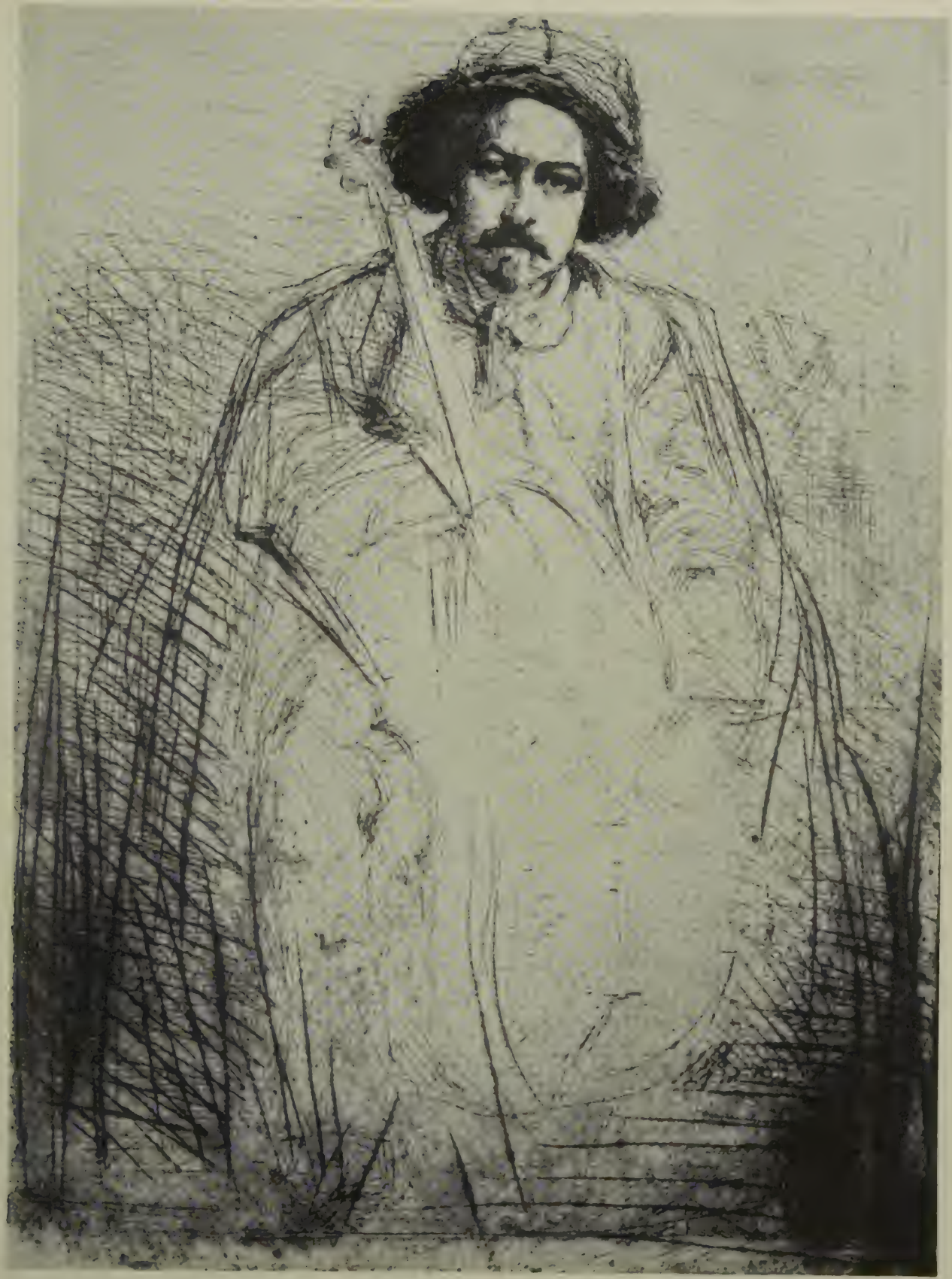
Miss Lillian Woakes *Oil* 1890-91
21″ x 14″
Collection of The Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, D. C.

Nocturne: Dance-House *Etching* 1863
10⅝" x 6½"
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Right:
Annabel Lee (Detail)
Watercolor
12⅜" x 6$\frac{11}{16}$"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Portrait of
Richard A. Canfield, Esq.
Oil c. 1901
20½″ x 12½″
Collection of
The Cincinnati Art Museum

Weary *Dry-point* 1863
7¾" x 5⅛"
Collection of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts



Becquet *Etching* 1859
10″ x 7½″
Collection of The Cincinnati Art Museum

Nocturne in Blue and Silver: The Lagoon, Venice *Oil* c. 1880
20⅛″ x 25⅞″
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Right:
The Little White Girl: Symphony No. 2 *Oil* 186
29½″ x 19½″
Collection National Gallery, London
Colorplate: Courtesy of Simon & Schuster

Thomas Carlyle *Oil* c. 1872
23¼" x 17¼"
Collection of Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania

Left:
Yellow and Blue (Fragment)
Oil c. 1872-74
9½" x 8¼"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art,
Washington, D. C.

Left:
Lady Meux: Harmony in Pink
and Grey *Oil* 1881
75⅜" x 36½"
Courtesy of the Frick Collection,
New York

Mrs. Leyland: Symphony in Flesh-
Color and Pink *Oil* 1872-73
82½" x 36½"
Courtesy of the Frick Collection,
New York

Left
The Artist in the Studio
Oil 1874
24¾" x 18¾"
Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago

The Little Nude Model Reading *Lithograph* 1887
11" x 7¾"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Nocturne: Blue and Gold, Valparaiso *Oil* 1866
29¾" x 19¾"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Sketches on the Coast Survey Plate *Etching* 1854
6″ x 10″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Portrait of Whistler *Drawing* c. 1845
4⅝″ x 3″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Cremorne Gardens, No. 2 *Oil*
27″ x 53⅝″
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

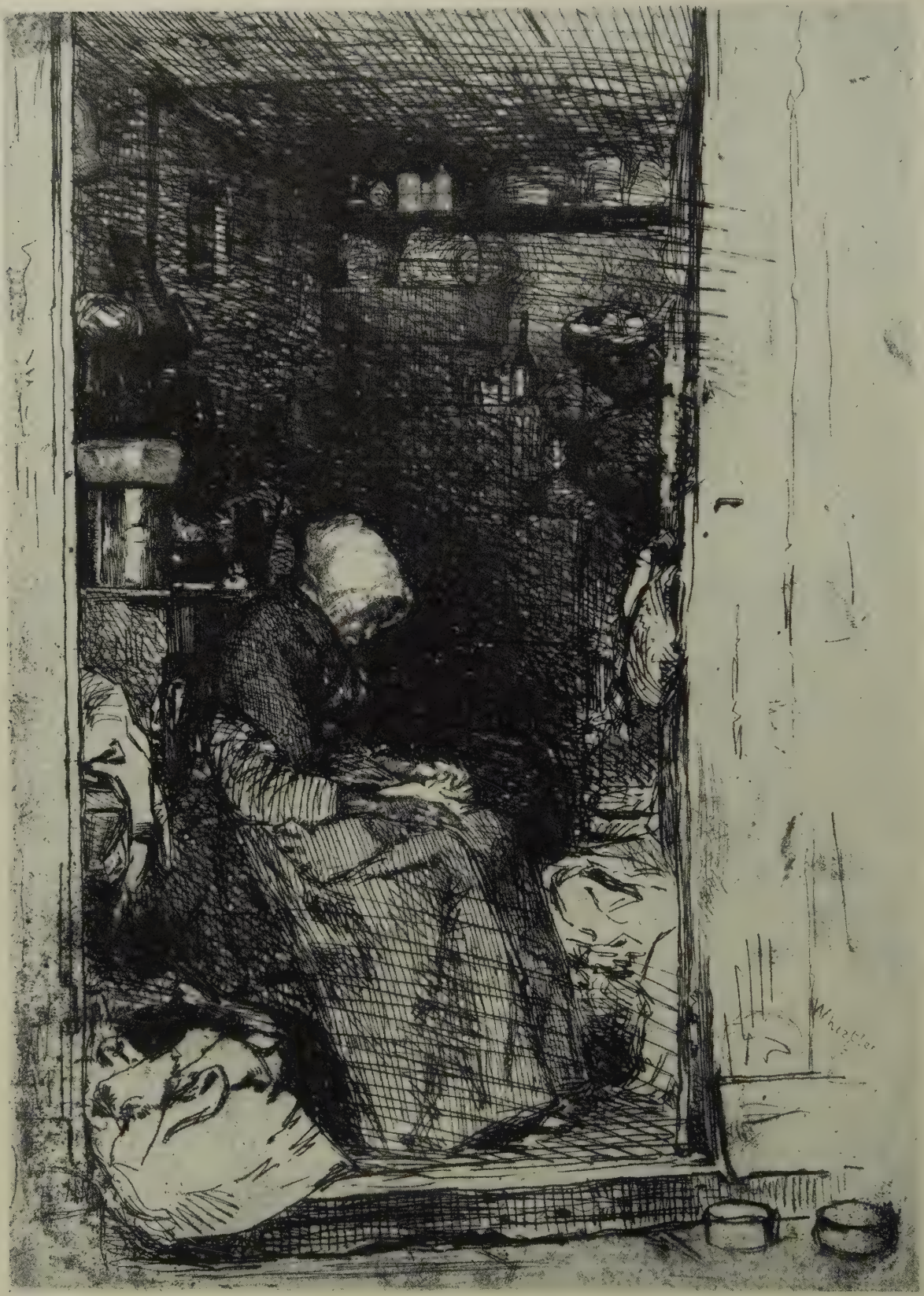
Pink Note: The Novelette *Watercolor* c. 1884
9½″ x 5 9/16″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

A Street in Old Chelsea *Oil* c. 1870-1875
5½″ x 9″
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Note in Opal: Breakfast *Watercolor* c. 1884
9⅜″ x 6⅝″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

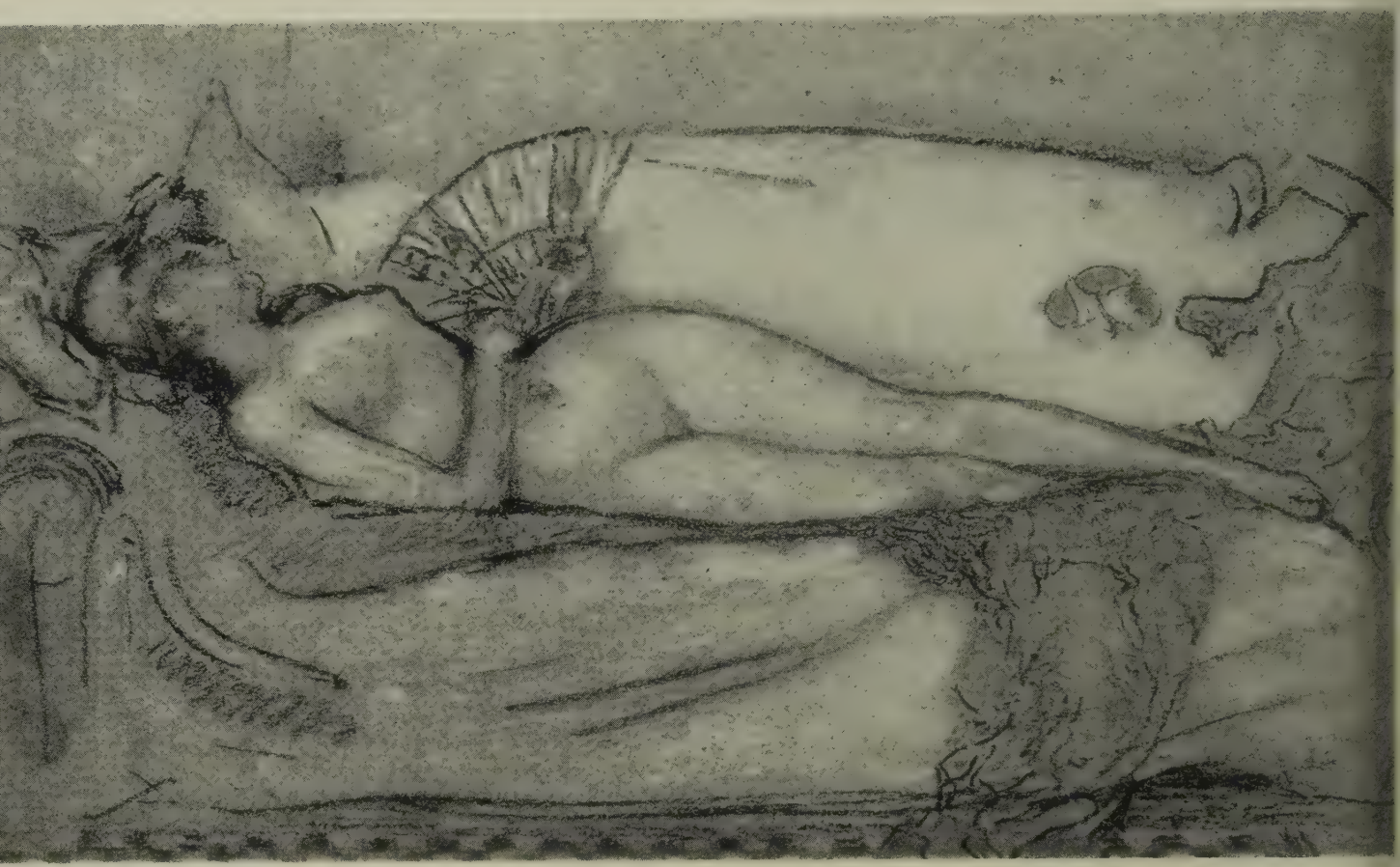
Sarasate (Senor Pablo Martin Melitor) *Oil* 1885
85½″ x 43″
Courtesy of Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh

Arrangement in Pink and Purple *Oil*
12″ x 19″
Collection of The Cincinnati Art Museum

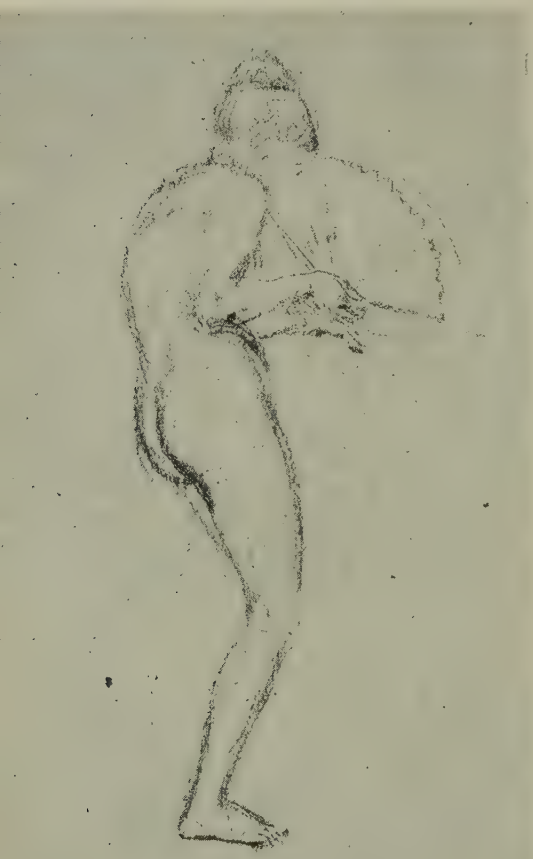


La Vieille aux Loques *Etching* 1859
8¼″ x 5⅞″
Courtesy of Harlow, Keppel & Co., New York

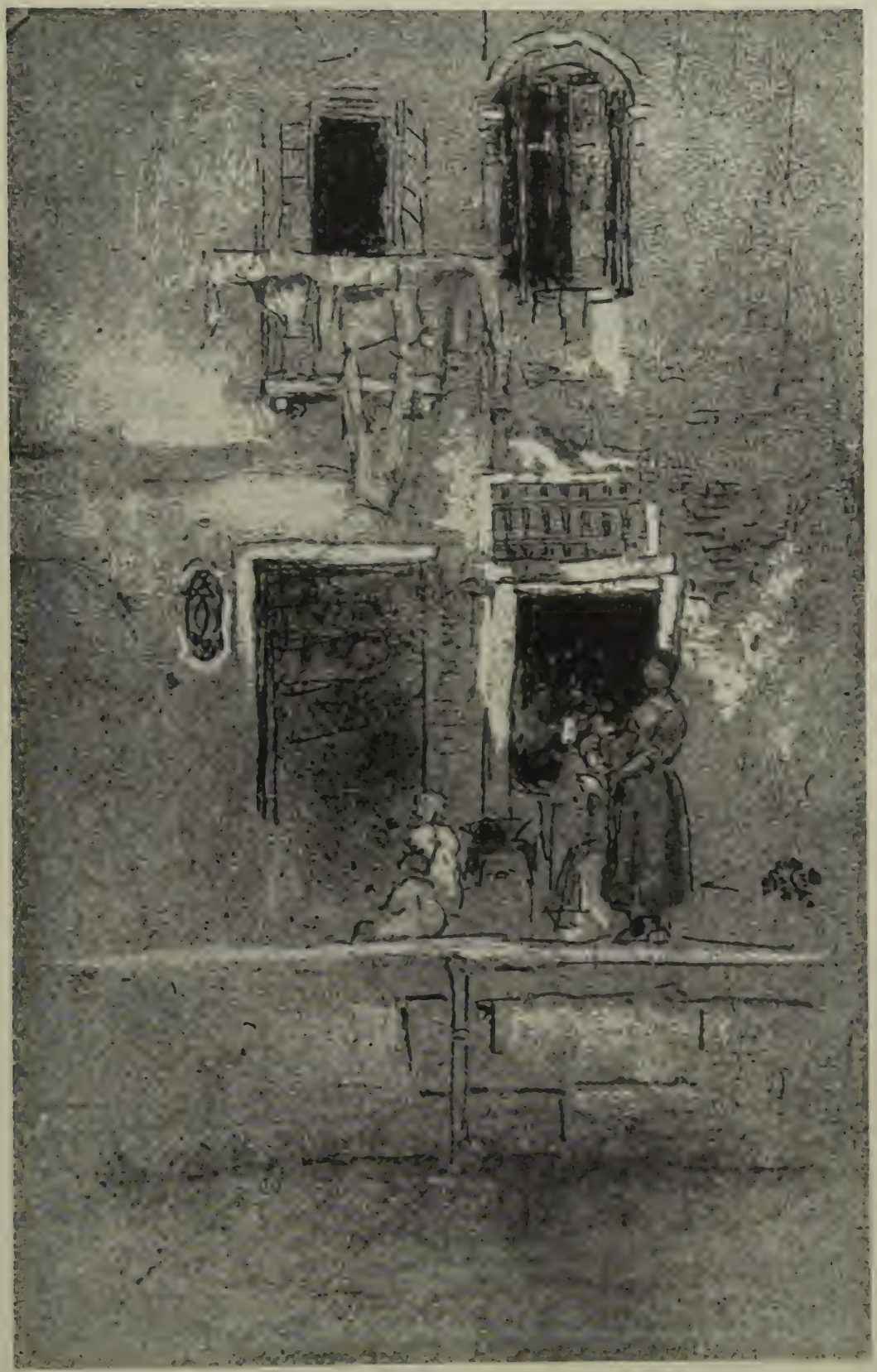
The Thames in Ice *Oil* 1860
29¾" x 21½"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.



Pour le Pastel: Rose and Opal *Drawing*
5⅝″ x 9 7/16″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.



Nude Figure of a Woman with a Fan *Drawing*
11¼″ x 7⅛″
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

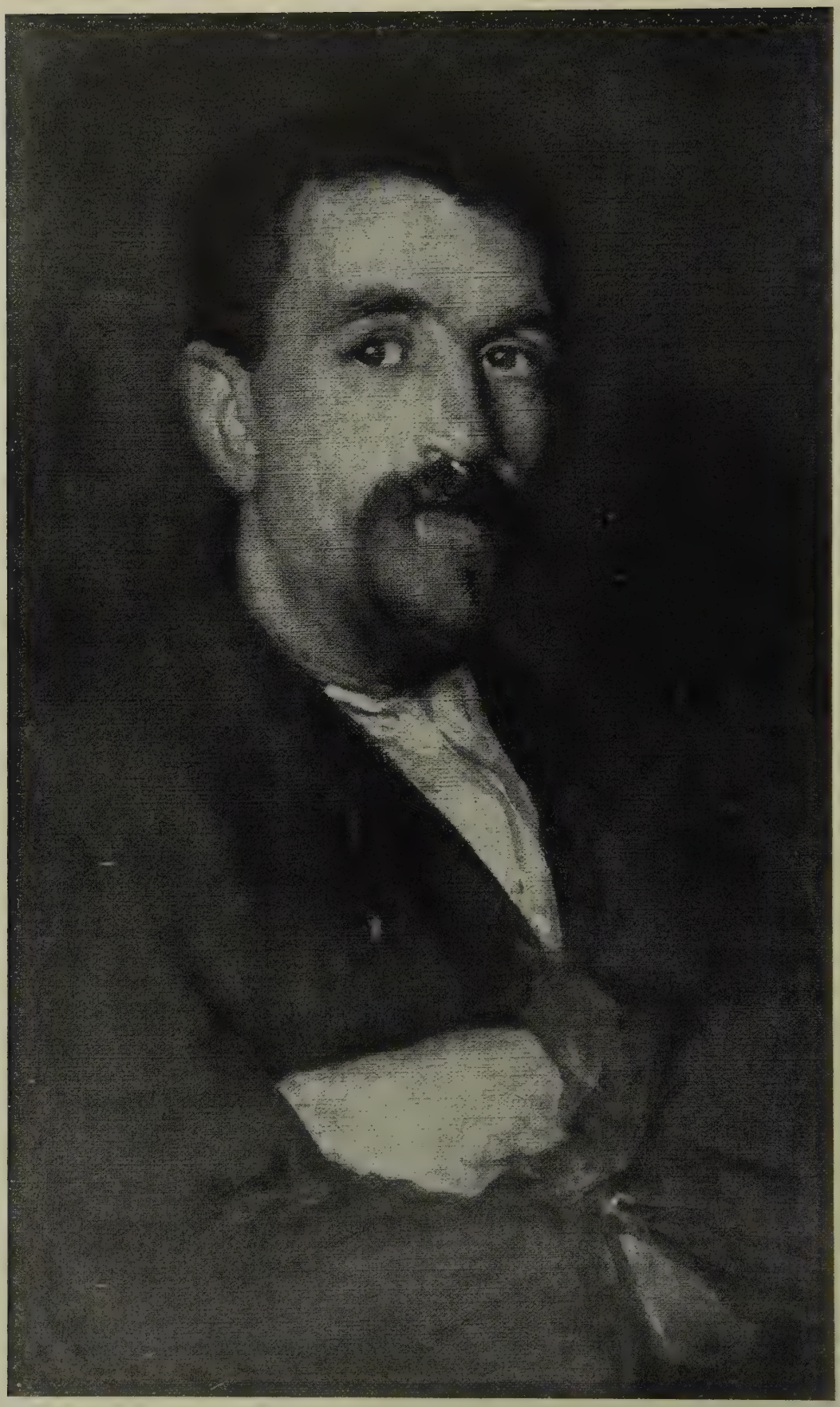


Bead Stringers, Venice *Pastel* c. 1880
11¾" x 7¼"
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Little Rose of Lyme Regis
Oil 1895
20″ x 12¼″
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

eft:
lue and Silver: Boat Entering Pourville *Oil*
½" x 9"
ourtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

La Marchande de Moutarde *Etching* 1858
6⅛" x 3½"
Courtesy of Kennedy & Co., New York



The Blacksmith of Lyme Regis *Oil* 1895
20″ x 12¾″
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Lewis Jarvis *Oil*
78
16″
ction of the
College Museum of
t, Northampton

Coast of Brittany (Alone with the Tide) *Oil* 1861
34¾″ x 46¾″
Collection Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut

Right:
Battersea Bridge
26″ x 19¾″
Collection Tate Gallery, London

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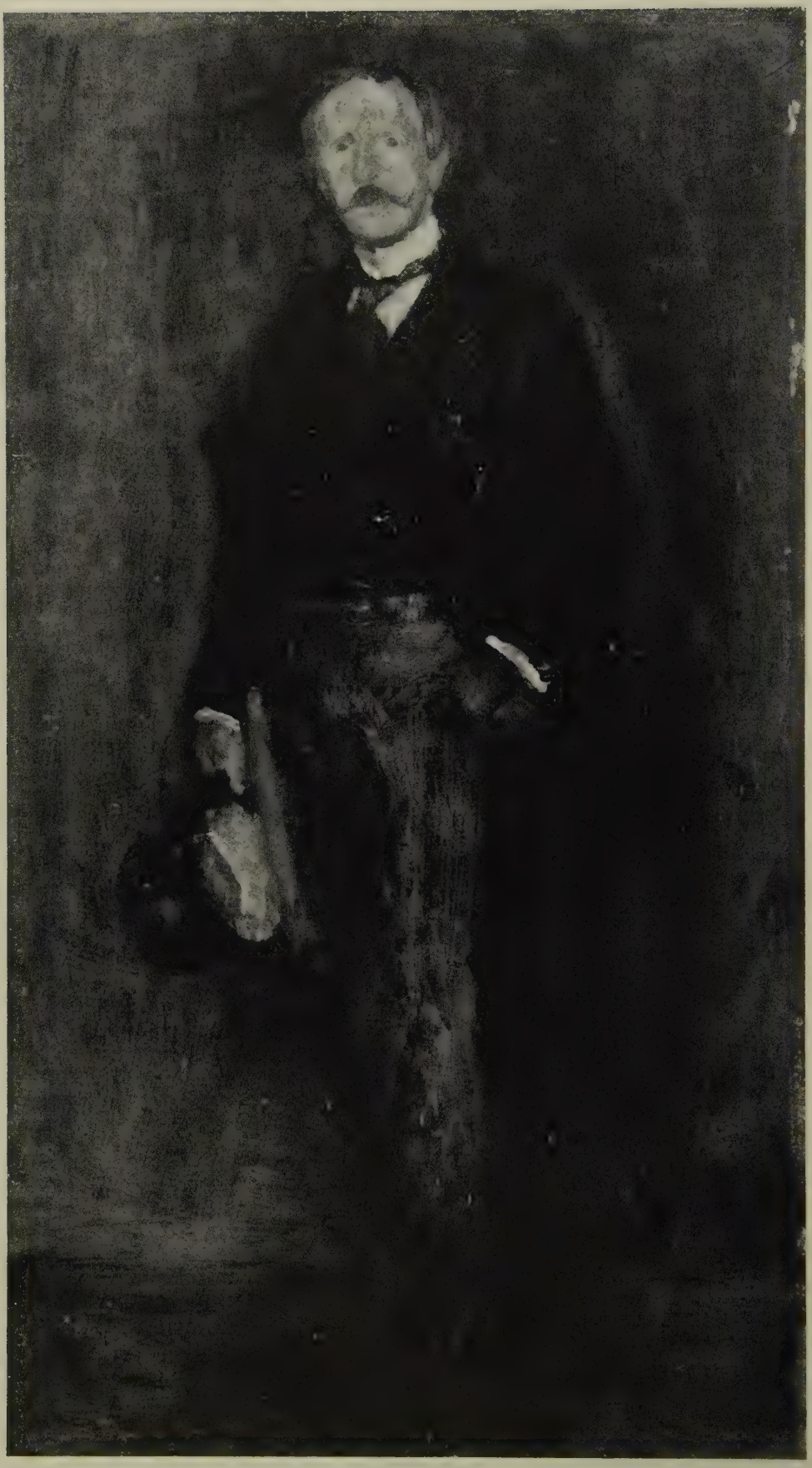
Nocturne in Green and Gold: Cremorne Gardens, London, At Night *Oil*
25⅛" x 30⅜"
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Edward G. Kennedy *Oil*
11⅝″ x 7″
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Madame Camille d'Avouille *Oil* c. 1855-60
31¾" x 21"
Collection Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover

Left:
The Music Room: Harmony in Green and Rose *Oil* 1860
37¾" x 28"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Rose and Silver: The Princess from the Land of Porcelain *Oil* 1864
77⅝" x 44⅜"
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Rotherhithe *Etching* 1860
10¾" x 7¾"
Collection of The Cincinnati Art Museum

Thames Warehouses from Thames Tunnel Pier *Etching* 1859
3″ x 8″
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

The Unsafe Tenement *Etching* 1858
6¼″ x 8 15/16″
Collection of The Cincinnati Art Museum

Sail Boats *Watercolor*
8¼″ x 4¾″
Courtesy of M. Knoedler & Co., New York

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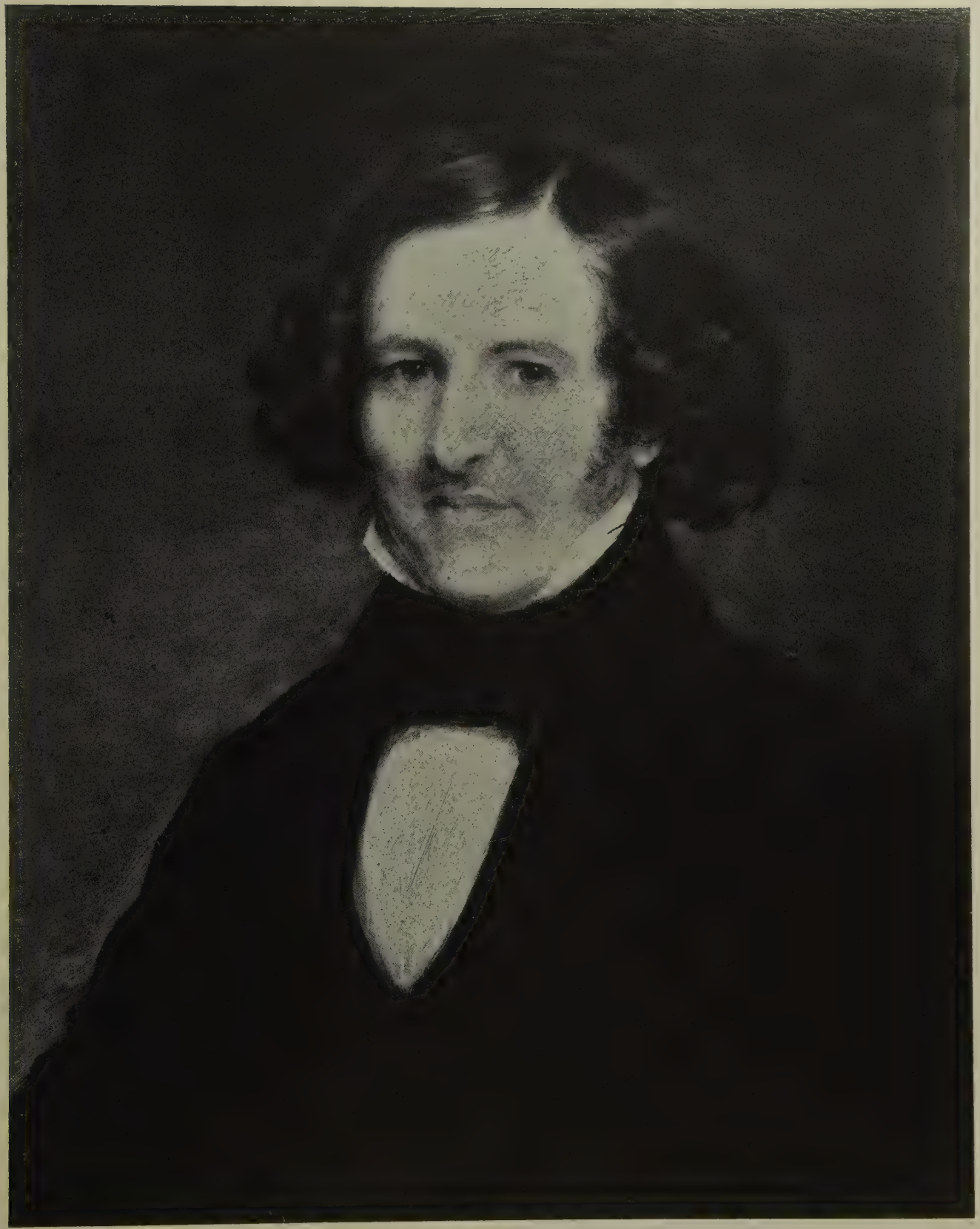

Left:
Mother of the Artist *Oil* 1871
56″ x 64″
Collection Louvre, Paris

Portrait of Major Whistler *Oil*
12″ x 10′
Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Marine *Oil*
8½″ x 5″
Collection of
The Cincinnati Art Museum

The Terrace, Luxembourg *Lithograph* 1894
3⅞″ x 8¼″
In the Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York

The Dancer (Connie Gilchrist) *Drawing*
5″ x 6″
Courtesy of The Cleveland Museum of Art

Nocturne, Southampton Waters *Oil* c. 1884
20″ x 30″
Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago

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